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Official Letter

From the Commissioners of Correspondence

OF THE

BAHAMA ISLANDS,

&c.

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AN

Official Letter

FROM

THE COMMISSIONERS OF CORRESPONDENCE,

OF THE

BAHAMA ISLANDS,

TO

GEORGE CHALMERS, ESQ.

COLONIAL AGENT.

CONCERNING

*The proposed Abolition of Slavery
in the West Indies.*

Liverpool :

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OFFICIAL LETTER,

&c.

OFFICE OF CORRESPONDENCE,

New Providence, 29th July, 1823.

SIR,

WE learn, with extreme anxiety, from different quarters, concurring accounts of an intention to bring before Parliament without delay, some project for the total extinction of slavery in the British West Indies. The details of the intended measure have not as yet reached us, in any tangible shape; only some observations with which Mr. Wilberforce introduced a petition in the House of Commons, from the quakers; and a pamphlet, in the name of the same person, entitled, "An Appeal to the religion, justice, and humanity of the inhabitants of the British empire, in behalf of the negro slaves of the West Indies." But as Mr. Wilberforce has ever stood foremost, as the leader and principal organ of a political party at home, apparently of no small influence, which for the last thirty years and upwards, has, as is now admitted, pursued a studied system of gradual encroachment on the long acknowledged and most important rights of the colonists, there can, we think, be little doubt, but that a powerful exertion of the energies of that party, is now preparing to effect, as soon as possible, the

grand consummation of all their labours. And we therefore deem it equally unnecessary and unsafe to wait for more particular information, as to any one or more of the schemes that may be in contemplation; and hasten at once, through you, to appeal to the justice of the British government and nation; solemnly protesting against all possible plans for the emancipation of our slaves, without our own consent,

It is urged that the colonists originally acquired their property in slaves by means never before recognized as legitimate by the laws of nature or nations. But although in some instances, such may perhaps have been the case, we cannot be persuaded that it was so, by any means to the extent represented in the fables of the African institute, or the publications and speeches of its friends. Those tales of other times, no doubt have frequently had the effect expected from them, with those who allow themselves to feel only, where they ought to reason also. But at this day, surely it is almost impertinent to inquire how the property in question was first obtained. Even admitting that the negroes brought from Africa were not all slaves in their own country, prisoners of war, convicts, or otherwise regularly reduced to bondage,—admitting that many of them were kidnapped or carried off by fraud or force;—the time is now receding out of view when those crimes are alledged to have been perpetrated. The supposed actors in those scenes, have either long since passed, or are passing fast from the stage of existence. And their successors have been left in guiltless possession of the property in question;—confirmed and guaranteed to them for ever, on the faith of their country, and by the solemn enactments of its most sacred laws. Whatever sins a few

individuals may have committed a century or two ago, the present proprietors of our slaves hold them as such, for the most part, by fair and lawful purchase. In the language of the scriptures, they *are our money*;* And to divest us of them against our will, however plausible the pretext for so doing, would, in plain language, be nothing less than robbery.

In this reasoning too, whatever our opponents may affect to think of it, there is nothing new. It is founded on one of the most ancient and necessary principles of human jurisprudence. For if we may travel back one or two hundred years, to detect a flaw in title to property, why not five centuries, or more? And under the operation of such a scrutiny, where is the inheritance, even in the fairest portions of the mother country, whose origin might not be traced to tyranny or fraud?—Some supposed incidental right of conquest, arbitrary escheat, lawless sequestrations, superstitious endowments, or some one or more of those multifarious outrages of military power or civil exaction, which crowd the annals of our country, during a long succession of ages? Had not the law, therefore, going hand in hand with reason and necessity, placed some certain barriers, beyond which the rights of the innocent heir should not be affected by the crimes of his ancestor, of how little avail would any earthly possessions now be?

We have indeed heard some idle report of an intimation that our slave holders are to be allowed an adequate consideration for the property of which they are to be deprived.

* Exodus, c. xxi, v. 21.

ved. Without questioning the right of the community to the use of private property, at a liberal or fair price, when the public good requires the sacrifice, we have only to say, that when England is prepared to add two hundred millions more to her present national debt, it will be quite time enough to discuss the details of the project.

In Mr. Wilberforce's pamphlet, no particular scheme of emancipation is insisted on; though several are alluded to. The one on which he descants with apparent preference, is that of fixing a date, beyond which the children of slaves are to become free at their birth; specially admitting that the owners of the mothers should be entitled to the services of the children, *gratis*, for some years after puberty, as a compensation for the expence and trouble of bringing them up. How kindly considerate is all this! A negro is to be fed, clothed, and according to Mr. Wilberforce, educated also, for, say, twenty-one years, during which the master is to be indemnified with the labour of that negro, for about five of, by the bye, the most worthless years of a labourer's life; including the chance of death, sickness, and other accidental causes which might deprive the proprietor of the possibility of receiving any compensation at all. The English mechanic has to maintain his apprentice only while he enjoys the benefit of his labour; and if the trade be lucrative, generally receives a handsome *bonus* on the execution of the indentures. One of the charms of this plan, no doubt, is its economy. If the state will have to pay for the emancipations, it would be quite convenient to force the article into the market, when at its lowest possible price. This would be about as honest in principle, as if the public good, or the caprice of a prevailing party, should require, for instance, the abolition of

the manufacture of silk, of course at the public expence; and the silk abolitionists should carry their views into effect, by merely destroying all the silk worms' eggs, conscientiously paying the manufacturer the precise specific value of those eggs at the time of their destruction. Hence, too, all the anxiety of the abolitionists to convince the world of that which they cannot possibly themselves for a moment believe; namely, that the abolition of slavery would give no interruption to the agricultural or other pursuits of the West Indies. Until therefore it is proved by some better evidence than the hollow and treacherous speculations of Mr. Wilberforce, that the slaves when manumitted, would still do the work of slaves, for hire, let us not be told that the planter can ever be remunerated for the losses with which he is menaced, by receiving from the national coffers, the price of a few infant slaves, unless the value of his lands, manufactories, improvements and stock are to be included in the estimate.

You take my House when you do take the *prop*
That doth sustain my house. You take my life,
When you do take the *means* by which I live.

Merchant of Venice.

But we only weaken the force as well as sink the dignity of our cause, by descending to trifle with such frivolities. Our slaves and their descendants are ours, until their condition is changed by the fair operation of some legitimate principle of law.

In the question, whether we are to be pillaged of our property now, or ten years hence, there is not in point of sound reason, even the shadow of distinction. And how-

ever the abolitionists may affect to soften the harshness of their schemes, by an affectation of carrying them into effect by gradual means, if we are to be robbed at all, it only superadds the insult of mockery, to tell us that we are to be robbed only by instalments. This in the ears of an abolitionist, perhaps, may sound something like mercy; but it is in fact just such mercy as would be shewn a condemned criminal, whose punishment should be commuted from the summary process of instant decapitation, to the protracted torture of being broken *gradually* to pieces upon the wheel.

But it is asked, is the negro slavery in the West Indies to be interminable? While in other portions of the globe, the condition of the slaves has long been ameliorating, and in many of them, slavery itself has for a considerable time ceased to exist, shall the negro race of the West Indies alone be shut out from the hope of freedom for ever? To this we answer, that reflecting on the very tardy progress of the peasantry from slavery to freedom, in all other countries where the peasantry once were slaves, and now are free, we contemplate in that change rather the work of a gracious providence than of presumptuous man. As the general condition of a community improves, every class of that community naturally benefits by the improvement. And in due season, should the tide of prosperity not be checked by some of the many wayward visitations of calamity, to which every portion of mankind is equally exposed, all social distinctions, in point of social rights at least, have generally been observed to subside. But the immense change for which in all other places, the revolutions of ages have frequently been required, ought, in the opinion of Mr. Wilberforce, to have been effected by

him for the West India negroes, in little more than the quarter of one century; and laments that he has so long delayed the attempt.

To await the maturity of time and of circumstance absolutely necessary to convert slavery into freedom, and by the only means which can effect that change, with safety to the public weal, and justice to the owners, or real benefit to the slaves, but ill suits the impatience of our abolitionists, now for the first time openly avowed. And because no hope can reasonably be indulged, that the colonies themselves will adopt any very hasty measures on the subject, Parliament and the nation are vehemently called upon to interfere in a manner equally unconstitutional and unjust, and in palpable violation of the good faith of the country, and the repeated pledges, not only of government, but of the very party itself which has now at length unmasked its last battery upon the falling fortunes of the colonies. The abolitionists, indeed, affect to speak of us, as if the work of emancipation had never yet been begun in the British West Indies: when in fact, it has not only had a beginning, but already made a degree of progress in most of the colonies, as we believe, and certainly in this one, almost beyond those limits, within which a cautious policy might have fairly restrained them. It is well known that all the islands abound in free blacks and people of colour; that is, slaves or the descendants of slaves manumitted, as a reward for peculiar fidelity, for general good conduct, for some signal service rendered either to the community or to individuals, or from some other fair motive of favour or natural claim on the justice or generosity of owners. While such alone are manumitted, there is of course the less to fear. Manumissions in fact under such

circumstances, generally loosen one bond of attachment, only to make others, of a milder character, more binding between the manumiser and his slave. Slaves manumitted by favour, seldom divest themselves of a certain feeling of obligation to their benefactors and their families, which, by natural association, possibly, they often extend to the whole class of the community to which those benefactors belong. By this means also, intelligent slaves alone are for the most part manumitted. It would indeed be only an act of cruelty to manumit any others. But by the plans of our London abolitionists, all distinctions of good and evil are to be done away. The slave of tried fidelity, of cultivated faculties, or exemplary conduct, is to be at once confounded with every thing that is base, treacherous, untutored and vicious, in the negro character and race. And all are to be indiscriminately hurried together into one giddy vortex of impetuous enfranchisement. Mr. Wilberforce complains, but, with his usual caution, when treading on ground that he has good reason to distrust, without naming either *time or place*, "that even since the mitigation of slavery was lately recommended from the Throne, in consequence of addresses from Parliament," (what recommendation and addresses are here alluded to?) "*Several* of the colonial Legislators," (how many, and which of them?) "have for the first time imposed fines, and others have greatly augmented the fines to be paid into their treasuries, on the emancipation of slaves: so that in some colonies they amount nearly to an entire prohibition. (page 42.) If it be true that such unreasonable taxes are imposed in one or two of the thirteen colonies, (which, however, we confess, under all circumstances, we are strongly inclined to doubt) surely it would have been but justice to the other eleven, to

point out particularly where the blame ought to fall ; and not involve the whole of the colonies in the odium of a measure, which the pressure of particular circumstances may have for a time rendered necessary or expedient in a very few. But justice in any shape, to any of the colonies, is not one of the articles of Mr. Wilberforce's religion. In the Bahamas, there neither is, nor ever has in fact been, any tax whatsoever on manumissions. There was an old law to that effect, we believe of the reign of Geo. II. but it was never acted upon: at least not a penny ever appears to have been paid into the Treasury under it; though multitudes have since been manumitted. And that law, obsolete, if we may use the expression, from the very hour of its enactment, has long since been, and still continues, repealed.

It might have proved some trial of our temper, but that we are relieved by a strong sense of contempt, to find our opponents still urging their old false, stale, and often repeated position, that were our slaves made free, they would continue to labour in our fields on wages. There are, as we believe, upwards of a thousand free blacks and people of colour within these islands, and scarcely an instance is within our recollection of their ever having so employed themselves: though the wages of hired labourers have been from ten to twelve guineas a year, with full allowance besides, of food, clothing, and all other necessaries. " Since the dissolution of the late black corps," says Mr. Wilberforce, " many of the disbanded soldiers have maintained themselves by their own agricultural labours, and have manifested a degree of industry that ought to have silenced for ever, all imputations on the race." (page 67.) In this statement we venture to assert that

there is no truth. First, because we have it only on the authority of Mr. Wilberforce, whose misinformation (to give it the mildest name) in all such matters, has already been notorious; and in many instances detected and exposed. Secondly, because, as usual, we are not favoured with the *when* and *where* of the miracle. For the story is introduced not only without date, but, what is of more importance, without even saying in which of our islands this novelty is to be found. And lastly, because it is in perfect inconsistency with every thing that we have had occasion to observe among ourselves in like cases. The disbanded black soldiers that have occasionally found their way to these islands, have uniformly been the veriest vagrants in existence, and the terror of all around them. Of the last two that found the means of living here for any length of time, one was hanged, about eighteen months ago, for burglary, and the other saved his neck only by turning King's evidence against his companion:—a precious specimen of those corps, the dissolution of which Mr. Wilberforce so deeply regrets. (paga 67.) We suspect indeed that this unhappy compliment to “the diligence” of those sooty Cincinnati, is of the manufacture of Sierra Leone; a soil hitherto fertile only in fictions and fevers; and a settlement which, under the hallowed and wholesome auspices of Mr. Wilberforce and his institute, has long been a notorious sink of nearly every disease, moral and physical, with which humanity can be infected.

Again,—we have “*many* hundred,” (Q. *how many?*) of American negroes at Trinidad,—“slaves enfranchised by desertion,” and yet, *many* of them” (we again ask how many?) “have worked as hired labourers for the planters, with so much diligence and good conduct, that they are now

universally regarded as a valuable acquisition to the colony." —(page 68.) Here again we think ourselves authorized to be not a little incredulous. The locality of the tale, indeed, was judiciously chosen. From the absence of every thing resembling a free government in Trinidad, there is of course the less danger of a public contradiction. Upon what authority then does the matter rest? Not upon that of Sir Ralph Woodford: for though his name is introduced, ingeniously enough, to give some seeming colour of truth to the picture, he is, in point of fact, stated only to have allowed the negroes in question to be *received* into the island. The authenticity of all the remainder of the story, rests entirely with Mr. Wilberforce: and from which therefore, for reasons already given, we consider ourselves justified in withholding all credit. If for *many hundreds* of negroes in this case, we ought to read, say *two or three hundred*, and instead of the *many* that worked for wages, we should insert merely the number *three or four*; this would be quite enough to save the credit of an abolitionist. These generalities are admirable expedients to accomplish all the purposes of positive falsehood, and at the same time keep sufficiently within the strict limits of truth, to reconcile matters to the conscience of Mr. Wilberforce, or any of his fellow-labourers, who have favoured the world with their lucubrations for the last eight or ten years.

In some of the northern states of America, different plans of emancipation were some time since adopted, with more or less ingenuity, to extinguish slavery. This is now quoted as a precedent for the West Indies. But between the two cases, there is scarcely a shade of resemblance. The slaves in those states were very few. They were nearly all domestic servants; very little employed in agriculture. And what widens still more the distinction, in this respect, between

those states and the colonies, is that those emancipatory laws were the acts severally of the particular states themselves, and not, as Mr. Wilberforce thinks it ought now to be, that of the general government of the Empire, Again—let us ask, has the emancipation of those American slaves sent any of them into the fields to follow agricultural pursuits? If we are correctly informed, their taste has never been found to lie in that direction. As with us, that class of people set little value upon freedom, but as an exemption from labour; and are almost every where to be found, only in the purlieus of towns, or populous settlements, in situations not altogether calculated to improve their supposed habits of industry, or those moral and spiritual tendencies, on which it has of late been so much the fashion to compliment that interesting race. The slaves of the more southern states of North America, on the other hand, are employed principally in Agriculture. These states accordingly have never yet, and probably never will, follow the example of their more northern neighbours. And the latter, as we are informed on good authority, already acknowledge themselves as heartily sick of their new fellow citizens, as they can with any degree of consistency or sound policy perhaps at present avow.

It is absolute trifling with the people of Great Britain, and worse than trifling with the colonies, to persist thus in holding out the absurd idea, that negroes when emancipated, would continue to employ themselves in the cultivation of West India produce, upon wages. Does any thing in the habits of the country from which they originally came, justify the expectation? Nothing; let the African institute, and all the portfolios of Sierra Leone pretend what they may on the subject? Does the experience of any one island in the West Indies justify it? Not one; let Mr. Wilberforce say what he pleases

about his disbanded soldiers and American deserters. Or to come still closer to the point, does the present situation of St. Domingo, and the dreadful aspect of affairs in that abyss of anarchy, kept down only by arms, justify it? On the contrary, to raise a twentieth part of what once was the produce of that unfortunate island, the peasantry had to be reduced to a state worse than military vassalage; infinitely more degrading, unjust, odious, sanguinary and cruel, than Mr. Wilberforce, himself, even under the malignant influence of one of his worst West India nightmares, could possibly dream of finding in any portion of the western world. The cultivators of the soil in Hayti, we understand, are not, like our slaves or our soldiers and sailors, exposed to the horrors of the cat o'nine tails. No, they are *free*,—And therefore they are only *sabred* or *shot* when they failed to bring the expected quantity of produce into the *quondam* royal, but now presidential exchequer. Mr. Wilberforce's allusion indeed to the present state of St. Domingo, is most unfortunate for his cause; particularly with respect to the religious improvement likely to be the result of suddenly manumitting any large body of slaves. In that ill-fated island, our missionaries, reasoning possibly with Mr. Wilberforce, calculated no doubt on a rich harvest of grace among negroes now no longer restrained by the chains of bondage, from the means of religious instruction. Let the mission speak for itself. While in nearly every other part of the West Indies, the missionaries boast of increasing success and brightening prospects, the modern St. Domingo stands alone impregnable to the real truths of Christianity. On the 15th of January, 1821, the reverend Mr. Evariste, the missionary sent thither, writes thus: "every door is shut against us, and we are deprived in every possible way of liberty to act either according to the Gospel, or our own conscience, or the light of truth." Again,

“this city is a burden to me, on account of the fearful and horrible things which I see; particularly the habitual and sinful violation of the sabbath. Again, “we are like *sheep*, exposed to the fury of *the wolves*.”—Again, “for me, I am considered by them as one deprived of reason, a fool and enthusiast.” And again, towards the conclusion of the letter, “the only thing that keeps me here, is our dear society, which languishes like *a tree planted by the side of a FLAMING FURNACE!*” (See the Methodist missionary report of 1821, page 94.) The melancholy fact is, that St. Domingo, once the garden,—the Queen of the West Indies, is now inhabited, not exactly by savages; but by a race of beings, infinitely worse; degraded, in fact, beneath what they ever were before. The unsophisticated denizen of the African wilds, is ennobled in comparison with the wretched degradation of his Haytian brethren;—not merely relapsing into barbarism, but sinking fast under an odious combination of the darkness, ferocity, vices, and superstitions of all colours and all nations; unredeemed by the virtues of any. To this state of terrific desolation it is, that Mr. Wilberforce and his friends are now finally labouring to reduce the whole of the British West Indies.

The maroons of Jamaica, also alluded to by Mr. Wilberforce, (page 8,) furnish a notable instance of the egregious fallacy of his speculations on this head. The maroons are a large body of negroes, who have been free since the time of Oliver Cromwell; forming a separate community of themselves, in the interior of the island; and for nearly a century acknowledged, respected and treated as free, and almost independent, by the public authorities of the colony: nay, encouraged and assisted in every fair pursuit. Now, under all these advantages, what progress has this favoured tribe

made in the arts of civilized life? Little or none. They are indeed useful in their way, by their activity in taking runaway slaves, and bringing them in to their owners, for suitable rewards. And this, as we understand, is one of their principal occupations. By agriculture, even in that fertile soil and genial climate, they do not raise enough to supply themselves with the necessaries of life; and become a direct charge upon the white inhabitants, for the deficiency. They have indeed more than once been the terror of the colony; and lay the general assembly, annually, under tribute, to keep them from making incursions on the properties of the white inhabitants. In the memorable maroon war of 1795-6, the most serious alarm was entertained from the well-known ferocity and craftiness of those hardy mountaineers. And when the insurrection was at length quelled, the safety of the colony required that the prisoners should be transported to North America; a measure which nothing but the strongest sense of necessity could have justified; as it was reluctantly adopted, at the expence of a breach of faith with the prisoners themselves, who surrendered under an express stipulation that they were not to be sent from the island.

Thus at once vanishes all the idle illusions of the abolitionists; who, in obstinate despite of all reasoning and all experience, still urge the perilous experiment of freeing our slaves, with the false and absurd assurances, that as free men, they would at once become more valuable servants. At some considerable distance of time indeed, it might so happen, that after the usual convulsions of a tedious transition from slavery to freedom, from savage to polished life, the descendants of the negroes now made free, might acquire a new character, and be what other nations under similar circumstances have become before them. But unless some miracle should work a

change in human nature, such as never has been known before, many are the generations which must pass away before the completion of the metamorphosis. And in the mean time, at least three hundred millions of British capital, engaged in agriculture and commerce, must be swept into annihilation; some of our finest possessions in the western world wasted into wilderness, and the once proud residences and manufactories of the colonists become only dens for wild beasts, or fastnesses for savages.

Mr. Wilberforce, if he is to be believed, wishes to begin systematically, "by all lawful and constitutional means, to mitigate, and as soon as it may be safely done, to terminate, the negro slavery of the British colonies;" (page 1.) First, then, as to his system of mitigation: this is to consist of increasing the food, and lessening the labour of the slaves; instructing them in religion; encouraging them to marry; abolishing all arbitrary, cruel, and indecent punishments; and finally attaching the negroes to the soil. To the last of these alone, we can have any objection. To attach a gang of negroes to any one plantation in the Bahamas, would be to condemn them to famine in a very few years; where the soil is of so light a texture and of such little depth, that when deprived of the shade and protection of the woods, and brought into cultivation, the land is soon reduced to a mere rocky barren. As to negroes being sold, either by their owners, or under execution for debts, so as to separate families, or deprive individuals of what Mr. Wilberforce is pleased to call their *peculum*, such practices are unknown among us; or if attempted, would deservedly bring down on the offending party, the reprobation of the community. But if there be any colony in which the slaves are not sufficiently fed, or too hardly worked; where religious instruction is withheld

from them, or marriages not encouraged; or arbitrary, cruel, or indecent punishments are inflicted; we heartily concur with Mr. Wilberforce in saying, let the evil be remedied, "by all lawful and constitutional means." But as to what those means are, or ought to be, we may perhaps differ from Mr. Wilberforce. Most of the colonies, it is admitted, make excellent laws for the protection of the slaves; but according to Mr. Wilberforce, none of them are executed; and until Parliament interferes, the slaves will never be the better for any law. But with due deference, let us ask, can Parliament itself in its omnipotence, do any thing more than make laws? And if the colonial laws are evaded by the colonies themselves, what would there be to protect the enactments of Parliament from a similar fate? If the laws which we ourselves provide, with a close and intimate knowledge of the subject requiring regulation, are not carried into execution, would the difficulty be lessened by having the same subject regulated by gentlemen, able statesmen no doubt, but with very little other insight into our affairs, but what they acquire from official reports, documents too often of a mere artificial character, and the writings and speeches of persons, all whose little greatness and influence, and sometimes whose comfortable incomes, or daily bread, in a great measure, depend upon keeping up the cry of avarice, rapacity, irreligion, and cruelty, against the whole of the West Indies.

From this sweeping calumny, indeed, the West India proprietors, resident in England, are always respectfully excepted, by the prudent Mr. Wilberforce. At page 2, he compliments them highly on their humanity and benevolence. And though he does not deny that the same atrocities are committed on *their* plantations as elsewhere, he excuses these *worthy men*, on the plea of their total ignorance of the matter.

At page 27, he again takes occasion to say something handsome of these same gentlemen, as "being sincerely desirous that their slaves should enjoy the benefits of christianity"—"though their pious endeavours have been, of little or no avail." And again at page 76, he repeats his encomiums, believing "many of them" to be "men of more than common kindness and liberality,"—"but utterly unacquainted with the system with which they have the misfortune to be connected!" Now, in the name of every thing contradictory, what is the meaning of all this? If the West India proprietors, resident in England, know nothing of the system in question, who but themselves can be blamed for their ignorance? At least if they do not know that their slaves are every day more worked, almost past all endurance; more than half starved throughout every season of the year; flogged most unmercifully and indecently for every slight offence, or even for none, &c. &c. &c., it is surely not the fault of Mr. Wilberforce, his institute or his friends, who have let fly at least two or three hundred pamphlets and publications of different kinds, during the last thirty years, informing these proprietors, as well as the world in general, of all those important facts. The sober truth is, that many of these proprietors are gentlemen of fortune and figure in life, and whose unimpeachable characters are sufficient to silence at once all the idle clamours of our factious abolitionists, except among such as can be made to believe that those gentlemen are kept in a state of profound ignorance as to what most nearly concerns them, at least in this life. Some of those same gentlemen also, we understand, have seats in parliament; and to them of course it behoves the saints, in their temporal capacity of politicians, to be as courteous as possible. This, in sad sincerity, is what, with Mr. Wilberforce, makes so wide a difference between the West Indian in England, and the Englishmen in the West Indies. How ad-

mirably does this pitiful truckling characterize the cause in which it is employed?

Mr. Wilberforce talks, but not always very intelligibly, of the want of "an executory principle" in all our laws for the benefit of the slaves, (page 40, *et passim*.) But whatever this executory principle may mean, we presume it might be as easily introduced into an act of Assembly as into an act of Parliament. And so far as this colony is concerned, we pledge ourselves that it shall be adopted as soon as we know specifically what is required; and it *may* be adopted with safety and equal justice to all concerned.

Many of the British excise and revenue laws indeed, contain in themselves, what possibly may be meant by an executory principle;—such as, keeping a custom house waiter on board of every vessel in port; a searcher on every wharf; a guager posted like a sentry at every distillery, &c. On a like plan, every house in the West Indies would have to open its doors at all seasons, by night or by day, to domiciliary visits; and every plantation to entertain a *familiar* of the African institution, in the character of a methodist preacher, or under some other like disguise, to report the frailties of his entertainer. What a delicious batch of jobs might be worked out of a little parliamentary interference in such matters! But perhaps we only trifle with a serious subject, by indulging in these excursions of conjecture, to penetrate the mysteries of the Holy office, by which our most important rights of property are now at length openly sentenced to confiscation.

Seriously, then, if by this same executory principle is meant that, in order to give effect to the laws in question, slaves are to be admitted as witnesses in courts of justice,

against their owners, we have only to say that by such a measure, the colonies would very soon cease to require any laws to regulate the relations of master and servant. In less than twelve months, there would be no slavery to ameliorate: nor a single slave to enfranchise, within the range of the West Indies.

If there be an innate sin in man, that of a total disregard of truth, appears to have been the natural portion of the whole of the African race. But whether this is to be considered as a matter of inheritance or not, it is at least a habit of no little inveteracy: and therefore so long as our negro children are brought up among their own kindred and countrymen, we must naturally expect that, like an hereditary disease in families, its cure is not to be calculated on in a hurry. Again, on the authority of Mr. Wilberforce himself, it is said, that the greater body of the slaves are mere pagans and heathens; and yet almost in the same breath, he plainly intimates, that these are the persons to whom we are to administer oaths, and receive as witnesses on questions implicating the lives and fortunes of thousands, nay, tens of thousands, of free British subjects. In England, Quakers, a society of christians of exemplary piety, are precluded from giving evidence in cases of capital felonies;—because they will not swear. But Mr. Wilberforce and his institute, swell with indignation against the West Indies, because we reject the evidence of those who, it is true, are willing enough to take every oath that may be administered to them; but without understanding the nature of one. So much for the casuistical consistency of our abolitionists. For ourselves we freely admit, that, setting aside all objections on the score of religion, there are motives of necessary policy, quite sufficient in the West Indies, to prevent the life or property of a white man, from being at any

time jeopardized, at will, by the information or evidence of a slave. That our slaves are all pagans, as Mr. Wilberforce will have it, certainly is by no means true. In these islands, particularly, there is scarcely an adult slave without some knowledge of the christian religion. Many of them in fact, for persons of their condition, are tolerably well instructed in its duties. But there is a peculiarity in that state of society in which slavery forms an essential ingredient, which renders it impossible to put the master in any manner legitimately at the mercy of his servants, without shivering one main link in the chain of subordination, on which altogether depends the integrity of the social bond. To understand this principle thoroughly, a personal acquaintance with the economy of a slave country, would, we confess, be of considerable assistance. It is absolutely provoking to hear gentlemen of high pretensions to talent and integrity, speaking of our negroes as they would of the peasantry of Yorkshire or Middlesex. And a wish has been often expressed on this side the Atlantic, that some of our modern philanthropists at home, who have so much wealth and time at their disposal, would only favour the West Indies with an occasional visit, and judge of us and our conduct and affairs, from their own observation. When Mr. Howard, the first philanthropist of his day, undertook the reformation of abuses in the public prisons, he did not sit at his ease in his study, building theories, and suggesting plans, upon the communications of Bridewell governors, gaolers or turnkeys, or those of any pitiful gaol birds that might escape from their cage, to carry tales to his private ear. He travelled every where to the prisons himself. At the risk of health and life; at the serious sacrifice of personal comfort, he entered them, examined them throughout, collected a valuable mass of information on the spot, and did more than any man that ever lived, towards the amelioration of the condition of those un-

happy sufferers whose imprudence or whose crimes condemn them to incarceration. But that sort of philanthropy is now getting entirely out of fashion. Our modern reformers, overlooking some hundreds of abuses, absolutely stinking under their nostrils, chuse for the theatre of their philanthropy, some country, as far as possible beyond the range of their own physical observation. As prophets, inferior even to Mahomet, they will not go to the mountain, though the mountain cannot come to them. All their information they obtain, if not by inspiration, certainly by means equally mysterious and inscrutable. And thus informed or inspired, they calmly undertake to legislate for countries which they never saw, but with the eyes of others, whom they are for the most part ashamed to name; and to correct abuses that exist only in the calumnies of those who either have a sordid interest, or take a mischievous delight in misrepresenting the actual state of the colonies.

At a crisis like the present, certainly of the most awful character, let every colony do justice to itself. With the other West India Islands, Jamaica excepted, our intercourse is but occasional and unfrequent. For ourselves alone, therefore, we undertake, on the present occasion, to speak; assured, however, that every other colony must be equally sensible of the necessity of a simultaneous appeal of a similar nature, to the justice of the mother country: the whole forming together, as we confidently anticipate, a powerful mass of contradiction, from every pertion of the British West Indies, to the unfounded slanders of Mr. Wilberforce, and his adherents.

Reserving, for a subsequent page, the question, as to the constitutional right of Parliament to legislate for the internal concerns of the colonies, and assuming it for the sake of argu-

ment, that under the pressure of some unprecedented and extraordinary circumstances, it might be expedient for the British Legislature to supercede in some particulars, the authority of the colonial Assemblies, let us examine what, in the present case, those very extraordinary circumstances are, as urged by Mr. Wilberforce, in his appeal; and how far they are founded in truth or otherwise. Here be it observed, that though we propose, as above suggested, to speak merely of the Bahamas, as being the only colony, with respect to whose affairs we can speak from our own immediate knowledge, we have no scruple in believing that the charges brought by that writer and his party, against the whole of the West India body, are as destitute of truth and justice every where else as they are here.

In the first place, it is said, our slaves are over worked; and to remedy that evil, task work is recommended. Now, *it is false* that our slaves *are* over worked; nor did we require the suggestion of Mr. Wilberforce, to introduce the system of task work: such having been, within the memory of the oldest of us, the uniform system of our planters and salt rakers, and others employing slaves otherwise than as domestics, sailors or mechanics; which latter, by the bye, work upon an average, only between eight and nine hours out of the twenty-four, throughout the year; which are precisely the same as the hours of labour with our white mechanics, who work for daily hire.

The truly disgusting tales of the abolitionists, of the slaves being, like beasts of burden, flogged out in droves, to their work, kept to it with the lash, and then driven back again to their stables, (appeal, page 15,) have, we solemnly declare to you, not the slightest foundation in truth, within these islands. Working gangs of slaves, like workmen of the same descrip-

tion in England, are superintended each by what we, perhaps unluckily, call a *driver*. Change the terrible appellation for that of *bailiff*, or some other designation more familiar to English ears, and we assure you that all the horrors of the employment vanish with the name. Drivers, indeed, sometimes carry whips in their hands, more commonly switches, but for little else than as the insignia of office; as parish beadles in England carry staves or rattans; or, to travel back to more classical authority, the Roman lictors of old carried a bundle of rods, with an axe in it, but seldom for any other purpose than the harmless one, of a little affectation of state. And as to the nature of the tasks generally imposed on labourers, we can confidently say, that we have frequently seen the days work performed in between four and five hours; and that there are no instances within our knowledge, in which the tasks are not, or might not easily be completed in seven or eight hours at the very utmost, even in cases of the most urgent need.

Again,—our slaves are insufficiently fed: an assertion easily made, and difficult to disprove: except by observation on the spot. But this, like the charge of over working the slaves, we have no hesitation in pronouncing to be a base calumny, as odious as it is unfounded. Slaves constitute in most of the colonies, a full half, and in these islands, at least three-fourths of our agricultural wealth. Is it to be believed then, that we are not only destitute of all heart to feel for those who are about us, but of heads also, capable of understanding our own obvious interests? Famine and toil combined make quick work with the human frame. A few months, nay, a few weeks, or even days, would be sufficient to hurry the emaciated victims of such cruelty, to the grave. Again then we say, let our sainted persecutors only come among us for once at least; and we pledge ourselves that they will find

in our field slave grounds, as well as in our houses, as healthy, sleek, and cheerful a peasantry, surrounded for the most with as wholesome children, as are to be found in any part of the British dominions. And in this way, and this alone, we propose to confound our slanderers. Here, indeed, as in the other colonies, the slave allowances are regulated by law. But the abolitionists are determined to give us no credit for our enactments; and therefore we have the more pleasure in closing our statute book, to open that of nature and fact, and exhibit the slaves themselves as the best refutation of the infamous calumnies in this respect, with which we as well as all the other colonies are indiscriminately assailed.

On the subject of religious instruction, among the slaves, we have only to say, that whatever little progress has hitherto been made in that necessary work, it would appear that it has of late worn a much more favorable aspect throughout the West Indies generally. The annual report of the Wesleyan connection alone, for some years past, are satisfactory on that head. And if the missionaries in the first instance, found some difficulties in acquiring the confidence of those who had charge of the slaves, it would seem that they have since persevered, and by no means in vain, to remove that obstacle to the success of their mission.

In these Islands, the slave population does not amount to twelve thousand souls. And we have two clergymen of the church of England, a Presbyterian minister, five indefatigable Wesleyan missionaries, and other licensed preachers, among which are four blacks, three of whom are Baptists, and one in charge of a chapel, where he performs divine service according to the forms of the church of England. The opportunities of religious instruction in our principal settlements, accordingly,

are numerous: nor are our plantations altogether without them. There are, as we have already suggested, few, if any, even of our field slaves, who do not profess christianity. And although the interest which our slave holders take in the religious improvement of their slaves, naturally varies with the respective opinions and habits of the former, we can confidently assert, that no obstacle whatsoever is at this time opposed, on any of our plantations, or elsewhere, to the dissemination of religious doctrines, among the latter.

Some of our planters, indeed, at one time, evinced a considerable degree of zeal in the cause. But as zeal, unless tempered, as it seldom is, with discretion, too often defeats itself; such possibly, to a certain extent, has been its fate here. It may have an unwelcome sound in the ears of modern puritans, but it is nevertheless true, that there is always more or less danger in giving temporal encouragement to spiritual merit. In that class of half civilized negroes, with whom cunning

————— supplies,
And amply too, the place of being wise.

Churchill.

a master who should take an over deep interest in the promotion of religion, would readily find many devoted proselytes among his slaves. And if favours or preferences follow as the reward of superior sanctity, it is not so often the best men as the best hypocrites that stand highest on the scale of promotion. And a few detections of that kind naturally inflict more injury on the cause of true religion, than can be for a long time afterwards healed by the only sound means of instilling moral truth into an untutored mind; namely, judicious, patient,

and persevering instruction. Methodists and others may boast of sudden calls to grace. But this, if not the creature of fraud or fanciful superstition, forms at least a distinguished exception from the ordinary dispensations of Providence; and can seldom be calculated on with confidence as genuine, if in the affair there should happen to be some worldly temptation to deceive.

One of the charges most gravely urged against the colonies, is, that instead of encouraging marriages among the slaves, a promiscuous intercourse of the sexes is even worse than tolerated. And a general denunciation of lewdness is brought against all the drivers, all the bookkeepers—every man, black or white, in fact, employed upon West India Plantations. This is a subject upon which the venerable Mr. Wilberforce appears to be peculiarly sensitive. It recurs nine or ten times, if not oftener, in his Appeal, (pp. 16, 18, and 20; and as respects managers and overseers, pp. 21-23—page 28, 32, and 53, *et passim*.) To all this we have the same answer as before, namely, that there is no truth in the accusation, so far as respects these islands. It rarely happens among us, that adult negroes are unmarried. And without fear of contradiction, we assert, that pains are taken, and generally with success, throughout these islands to promote early marriages among the slaves. We had not to consult the oracle of the African Institute, to know that the marriage state affords, perhaps, the best security for sobriety and steadiness among our people. Those who marry, generally collect some little stock of their own about them; and even their children, being the property of the same owner, contribute not a little to strengthen the ties of reciprocal attachment between servant and master. Yet, knowing and feeling all this, as clearly and sensibly, as any honest abolitionist could possibly desire, we are

accused of being so lost to all sense of propriety, as concerns the welfare of our slaves, and blind also to our own palpable interests, as to discourage marriages among them, merely for the amusement of a few young men, at the expence of introducing all manner of idle and irregular habits, and even disease, among our slaves. Is it possible that the Parliament of England can be persuaded, even upon the authority of Mr. Wilberforce and all his institute, that we are at the same time such demons and such fools. And although the marriages of our slaves are not always solemnized by clergymen (and for this plain reason, that our population is very thinly spread over a chain of seventeen different islands, extending upwards of five hundred miles in length; and in that space there as are yet but two clergymen authorized to solemnize marriages) the slaves, to a certain extent at least, are not on a worse footing than the white inhabitants of our out islands: whose marriages are for the most part, solemnized by civil magistrates; and have always been considered valid in law, when authorized by license of the governor. When opportunities offer, the negroes frequently obtain the sanction of the church to their union; but even when they do not, the habits of slaves, being from necessity domestic, it is pleasing to observe, how seldom the matrimonial contract among them, is violated, or dissolved except by death.

Mr. Wilberforce, indeed, is so immoderately shocked at the phantom which he has himself conjured up, of the libertinism of all classes and colours in the West Indies, that it would almost seem as if the suppression of that one vice, constituted the principal motive of his urgency for his long wished for reform. But as a matter of speculation, we are tempted to ask, whether, if such were the case among our negroes while in slavery, would the morals of these interesting sinners

be likely to reform much, under a sudden and entire release from all restraint? Or, to revert to the transatlantic philanthropy of Mr. Wilberforce and his institute, let us rather enquire, are there not some good old English instances of promiscuous sexual intercourse, even within the very bills of mortality, which stands just as much in need of chastening, as the alleged amours of our negro women and their drivers? Why has it become necessary for London Philanthropists to travel across the Atlantic for objects of reform, when so much remains still to be done at home? In one parish alone, (St. Mary-lebone) if the late writers on Metropolitan statistics are not much deceived, there are nearly as many females actually subsisting by prostitution, as there are slaves of both sexes and of all ages and colours taken together, in the Bahama islands.

We now come to the hateful charge of wantonly inflicting cruel and even *indecent* punishments on our slaves. Here again we plead not guilty, and challenge our accusers to the proof. Mr. Wilberforce cannot but admit that there are sometimes to be found in other places, a few people, as choleric, unjust and cruel, as in the West Indies;—that apprentices have occasionally been flogged to death, even in the philanthropic city of London, (page 60,) neither can it be denied that climbing boys have been feloniously suffocated in chimnies; and that even English soldiers and sailors are flogged sometimes to the very verge of life, the precise limits of which, are scientifically ascertained by a professional attendant at the flagellation. Yet, by the writings of Mr. Wilberforce and his friends, it would seem that injustice, cruelty, and indecency had been banished from every other quarter of the globe, and had at last found an odious asylum in the West Indies alone. To you, Sir, and to the British nation, we solemnly declare, and challenge all contradiction which can be supported by

any true semblance of evidence, that, with due allowance for a very few exceptions, arising out of the irremediable frailty of human nature, the punishments inflicted upon offending slaves in the Bahamas, are actually humane and mild, beyond all comparison, or rather we may say in contrast with the present criminal code of our mother country. Thefts and other crimes, which in England would cost the offender his life, are here expiated with a flogging. Desertion, for which the British soldier's back smarts, frequently under from two to five hundred or a thousand lashes, is punished here, at the very worst, by transportation; that is, a mere removal of the runaway, to some foreign colony; being in most instances, scarcely any punishment at all. Murders only, and felonies of the most atrocious character, are punished with death. But to read the tales of horror with which Mr. Wilberforce and his party, have frozen up so much British blood, one would suppose that every West India plantation was furnished with a complete assortment of all possible implements of human torture. When, in sober truth, a horsewhip or cat o' nine tails, for the most part, constitutes the dreadful entire of our sanguinary apparatus. What Mr. Wilberforce alludes to, in calling some of our punishments *indecent*, we do not exactly understand; unless it be that our younger negroes are sometimes subjected to the discipline of the rod, in the manner practised, as most of us well recollect, in the principal schools for the young gentry of Great Britain and Ireland. Elderly men and women are rarely punished with stripes, excepting for most serious offences; and even then, they are punished as men and women ought to be.

With respect to the subject of attaching negroes to the soil, we have, perhaps, said sufficient already. The very wish for such an arrangement, in fact, evinces either wantonness and treachery

on the one hand, or on the other, a decided ignorance, not only of the nature and capabilities of the country, but of the disposition and habits of our negroes. And even could such a plan be carried into effect, we are puzzled to understand how it would tend to the mitigation of slavery, either in point of fact or feeling. To confine a certain number of human beings within a given space of ground, there, with their posterity, to vegetate and rot, like weeds;—to convert them into a sort of heir-loom or mere chattel, attached to the freehold, in our view of the subject, is certainly one of the strangest expedients imaginable, either for the physical amelioration of the condition, or moral elevation of the slave. Mr. Wilberforce, indeed, rebukes us severely with considering our negroes, not as persons, “but mere chattels,” (page 13) and yet would himself, when it suits the purposes of an argument, reduce them to the condition of chattels of the meanest kind. The persevering anxiety of the abolitionists for this one scheme, in particular, has long carried with it, to our minds, what the abolitionists, indeed, now cease to disavow, that their grand object always was, as it now is, the total annihilation of all slave property in the West Indies. And their principal difficulty at this time is, how that object is to be effected, as expeditiously and *economically* as possible. Attach our negroes to the soil in the Bahamas, and both the negroes and the soil will soon be cheap enough for the purpose, so far at least as worthlessness may affect their value.

Even therefore should Parliament conceive that it possessed a legitimate authority to interfere with the domestic and other internal concerns of these colonies, let us ask, has Mr. Wilberforce made out a case sufficient to justify so unprecedented an exercise of that authority? At a time when few, if any, of the colonies had passed laws for the protection of the slaves,

or the amelioration of their condition; before scarcely an attempt was made to introduce christianity among them; and crimes against them might have been openly committed with impunity;—even then the right of property in slaves was revered as sacred, and manageable even by Parliament itself. But now, after the most important changes have taken place in almost every particular; when the slaves are every where under the protection of wholesome laws, which, let the abolitionists assert what they please, *are* enforced with more or less rigour in every colony; when christianity is rapidly gaining ground among them; when by the abolition of the slave trade, the slaves in the West Indies are effectually cut off from all further contagion of barbarism and paganism from Africa, and already begin to evince considerable advances, in point of habits and principles, to a better condition; when emancipations are daily becoming more common; and the rights of both free negroes and slaves are placed under a degree even of unnecessary protection, by the late registry laws, so strenuously recommended by the abolitionists themselves—still that restless party appear to be even more dissatisfied than ever; and in the fretfulness of their impatience for our final ruin, have at length discovered that Parliament, not only has a constitutional right to divest us of our property, or otherwise deal with it, at discretion, but also that unless Parliament does interfere, nothing can or will ever be done for the redress of those enormous but imaginary wrongs with which, unfounded in fact as they are unsupported by proof, every colony in the West Indies is indiscriminately charged.

What may be within the *power* of the British Parliament it would perhaps be as difficult to define, as it might be perilous to question. But power does not always constitute right. Our colonists being no longer represented in the

Parliament of the mother country, were placed by the Crown (and the right of the Crown in this instance has never been questioned) under the government of Parliaments of their own, the mother country reserving to herself or her Parliament, only a sort of homage from the colonies, in matters relating to their maritime concerns. A political right once unconditionally conferred, never can be recalled: or the liberties even of England would be at this day enjoyed only by sufferance of the reigning monarch. What was *Magna Charta* itself but a royal boon?—extorted indeed by intimidation; but perhaps on that very account, only the less binding on the bestower. The same might perhaps be said, with very little abatement of circumstance, to the Bill of Rights, as well as many other of those high securities of British freedom, which we have been so long in the habit of regarding with veneration. And yet, has it ever been pretended that Parliament could constitutionally revoke those concessions?

Whatever principle, therefore, of supposed dependence may be attached to those colonial bodies that have been incorporated only by charters, which perhaps as such, may be liable to forfeiture; or to those colonies, as the Canadas, the constitutions of which were originally created, and afterwards altered by the British Parliament; we conceive that the present constitution of the Bahamas, as well as that of Jamaica, and several other West India colonies, stands in this respect, upon the highest possible ground. We purposely avoid details, because they are already well known to all who interest themselves in West India affairs; and to those who do not, they would be of little use. Among the rash measures of the British ministry, in the early part of the revolt of the North American colonies, Parliament was induced to declare by law, that it had the right to legislate for the colonies *in all*

cases; a declaration, by the bye, which from its being deemed necessary at such a season, admits the existence of some serious doubts upon the subject. This high toned pretension accordingly was very shortly afterwards modified by the important exception of *the right of taxation*; and at last virtually abandoned *in toto*, by the recognition of the revolted provinces as Independent States. As therefore the General Assembly of these islands was lawfully constituted by the Crown, without any manner of Parliamentary sanction, except so far as the Assembly, with the King at its head, is in itself a Parliament for all local purposes, we sincerely hope that the question may never be seriously raised as a matter of contention with the mother country, whether the British Parliament can constitutionally interfere with our internal concerns. For on that point there can be but one opinion among the independent part of all the free colonies.

It is somewhat difficult for one not initiated in the mysteries of the sect of which Mr. Wilberforce appears to be the tutelary saint and champion, and in the doctrines of which there is so much pretension of religion, mixed up with so much reality of party spirit, and personal ambition, to understand why he (Mr. Wilberforce) should say, as he does, at the very opening of his Appeal, that he had chosen this particular season to hasten the ripening of his plot, on account of "the present embarrassments and distress of our own country—a distress in which the West Indies themselves have largely participated, &c." This certainly is, at first sight, a strange acknowledgment of motives; and might perhaps be altogether unintelligible, were it not that there lurks under the enigma, a hint sufficiently familiar to fanatical conceptions, that some extraordinary act of national piety is peculiarly necessary at this particular crisis, to propitiate the divine favour. And hence

a state of society in the West Indies, which has existed for centuries—and in other countries for series of centuries before, without having given apparently any very deadly offence to the Divinity, is now denounced as “a national crime” of such deep malignity, that neither the mother country or her colonies, can ever thrive again, until it is put an end to.” What will hypocrisy not hereafter dare, or superstition submit to, if so presumptuous, so impious an attempt to impose at once upon the spiritual hopes and temporal fears of the weak and worldly-minded part of the community, should be attended with success? Let these sanguinary high priests speak out, and tell the nation something like the truth, for once in their existence; namely, that they have determined upon a sacrifice in atonement for what they are pleased to call the sins of the nation; and that nothing is more to their taste than the agricultural and commercial interests of the West Indies, while not yet too much reduced to grace the altar, as the principal victims for present immolation.

But notwithstanding all this rant and cant of Mr. Wilberforce, upon the subject, the true reasons of the abolitionists, for resuming at this particular time their hostilities against the West Indies, is but flimsily disguised by the work now before us.

Since the trade to the East Indies has been thrown open to a certain extent, a new commercial interest is growing fast into importance at home; namely, that of the free traders to those countries; who appear to have powerful friends, both in and out of Parliament. And as an inferior sort of sugar is manufactured in the East, on terms which would materially affect the market for West India sugars, unless the latter should continue, as hitherto, to be protected

by competent duties upon the importation of the former into Great Britain, our old and inveterate enemies immediately availed themselves of this new commercial rivalry, to give the *coup de grace*, as they now seem to expect, to the grand vital principle of West India prosperity. A heterogeneous coalition has accordingly been formed between the servants of God, as they affect to think themselves, and those new-born children of mammon; in the sanguine hope that between a religious abhorrence of West India slavery on the one hand, and a liquorish preference, equally just, for East India sugar, on the other, the nation may be more easily reconciled to the destruction of the colonies in this quarter.

In the sugar question, we, as Bahamians, have no other interest than, that we should necessarily be involved in the general ruin of the colonies, should the abolitionists, reinforced as they now appear to be, by their new allies, become powerful enough to carry into effect their present destructive views. But we cannot forbear some expression of the resentment and disgust which we have, more than once, had occasion to feel, at the insidious and unprincipled attempts that are now making at home, to prejudice the mass of the people there against West India sugars, as the manufacture of slaves, in favour of those of the East, as being the manufacture of freemen. We conceive ourselves sufficiently well informed on the subject, to declare that no such distinction exists, except in name; believing as we do, from information on which we rely, that the whole of the Hindoo peasantry, though they are nominally free, are infinitely more oppressed, abject, and unhappy than nine-tenths of the slaves in the West Indies. Of political rights the Hindoos enjoy nothing. And except in the few English cities, and other large European settlements, the will of the master is the eternal law

of the land. When crops are abundant, the peasant may enjoy a temporary competence of the necessaries of life. But if the crops fail, famine becomes his inevitable portion. Every inch of arable land under the East India company's dominion, is let out at a rack-rent, through Zemindars, or other lordly upper tenants of large demesnes. And the consequence is, *that to eat*, the Hindoo peasant must work unceasingly. And in sickness or misfortune, he has ever to fall back upon his own poor scanty resources; which the necessities of a few weeks, or even days, for the most part, dry up irretrievably. Compare this miserable state of things—by the bye not much unlike that of the peasantry of some other countries which could be named nearer home,—compare it, we say, with the actual advantages of our negroes; to whom it is of little moment whether crops succeed or fail. Let hurricanes sweep our fields, or earthquakes bury them, our negroes must be fed and clothed, and lodged. They have no care for tomorrow; no provision to make for sickness or old age; no anxiety lest their children should want food or any necessary comfort. The effect naturally is, that, unless when spirited into disobedience or revolt by incendiaries, like the late *Amis des Noirs*, of Paris, or Mr. Wilberforce's present institute in London, our negroes are in general as contented beings as any whose lot for life is that of mere manual toil; indulging with zest in many luxuries and amusements adapted to the coarseness of their taste, and the humility of their condition: and in positive truth, however the sainted hypocrites of St. Stephen's may affect to groan over their supposed degradation and misery, constitute for the most part, as happy, thoughtless and cheerful a peasantry, as we believe to exist in any country under heaven, where the labour of the many, is employed principally for the benefit of the few. On the score of religion too, the favorite topic of Mr. Wilberforce, let us learn from

Mr. Wilberforce himself, low the Hindoo peasantry stand, in comparison with our negroes; among which latter, as our worst enemies have to admit, christianity has made, and is still making, at least some little progress. In Hindostan “a vast population had come into our hands, in the full blown enormity of *heathen* institutions; where the *bloody superstitions*, and *unnatural cruelties* and *immoralities* of paganism had established themselves *in entire authority*, and had produced their natural effects in the *depravity* and *moral degradation* of the species.” (page 32.) To this might be added the legality of *polygamy* and *concubinage*, to any extent commensurate with the circumstances of individuals. And can we wonder too much, that so immense and fertile a field for reform, just as much too within the British dominions as the West Indies, should be left so totally uncultivated by our saints, while all their energies are directed almost exclusively against the comparatively petty sins of these unhappy colonics. The sugar made by christian slaves, is surely as orthodox as that manufactured by pagan freemen.

However Mr. Wilberforce may affect to consider the existence of slavery in the West Indies, a national sin, let us ask, is that sin likely to be ever redeemed, in the eye of heaven, only by the perpetration of crimes of the most superlatively atrocious character?—Involving in them a premeditated certainty, to begin with, of individual robbery, throughout the whole of the islands; and with nearly the same eventual certainty of all the tremendous consequences of suddenly subverting the only system which, since the minds of the slave population have been unsettled by the publications and intrigues of their false friends in France and England, can possibly keep the knife from the throats,

and the faggot from the roots, of all the white inhabitants of the West Indies?

There is, indeed, but too much reason to conclude, that the true and more immediate object of this Appeal of Mr. Wilberforce, though ostensibly addressed only to the people of England, is one of a much less limited, and far more appalling nature than has as yet been avowed by its author. For the plan now promulgated, appears to possess, as it were, within itself, a certain "executory principle"—if we may borrow the phrase for the occasion;—one of a most fearful character, which threatens to carry its object, directly into practical effect, without the aid either of Parliament or of the colonial Assemblies. Whether viewed alone, or as the precursor of the measures which it menaces, that inflammatory Appeal, published as it now is to the world, is but too well calculated to become throughout the West Indies, a firebrand in the very worst of hands; and to produce the same tragical effects, which similar publications and similar measures in France, produced in St. Domingo; and which subsequent publications, and measures of the same tendency, in England, though professedly of a less alarming character, (we mean those on the subject of the Slave Registration) gave occasion to in Barbadoes;—filling even Jamaica, for a time, with apprehension and dismay. And indeed, after the strains of triumph and rapturous applause, in which the new dynasty of that blood thirsty brigand, Christophe of St. Domingo, was hailed in London, by the humane Mr. Wilberforce, and his tender hearted associates, at Freemason's Tavern, and elsewhere, can we conscientiously believe otherwise than those same London philanthropists would gladly dance, in spirit at least, round the smoking ruins of every thing valuable in the

West Indies, until a sufficiency of human blood was spilt, to quench the conflagration?

The reflections that have been so illiberally thrown on our colonial Assemblies, are too contemptible to receive much serious notice from us. If the members of our Assemblies are nearly all slave owners, it will at least, we trust, be admitted, that it is from among the most respectable of that class, that those members are generally chosen. And setting aside the common feelings of our nature, who, let us ask, next to the slaves themselves, can have so positive and immediate an interest in their well being, their health and comfort, or in correcting abuses which might bring the system into disrepute, as those very owners, or their representatives? But what renders the animadversions of the sainted Mr. Wilberforce, particularly ridiculous on this part of his subject, is, that according to him, the members of our Assemblies are not only all slave holders, but what, as he insinuates, is still worse, they are all bachelors, too. And in a note, (page 53,) the rough-shod eloquence of Mr. Brougham is brought in full charge against the West Indies generally on this point. "The want of modest female society," Mr. Brougham is made to say, "brutalizes the minds and manners of men, &c." Again,—"the witnesses of the planter's actions, are the companions of his debaucheries, &c." and of these and some other like *gallant* doctrines, of her late Majesty's Attorney General, Mr. Wilberforce avails himself, to shew that the Assemblies cannot be safely entrusted with the regulation, even of the more domestic concerns of the colonies. In the Bahamas, however, be it known, that the present Council consists of about eight members, and the House of Assembly, of twenty-nine; and that in the total of the thirty-seven, there are not

six bachelors. By an inversion of the usual mode of reasoning, Mr. Wilberforce begins by assuming the conclusion, that all members of the Assembly are brutes: and the task of proving, why they must be so, then devolves upon Mr. Brougham; who, to maintain an hypothesis absolutely untenable in point of fact, at once votes all the wives and daughters of our legislators out of existence. Surely this is not doing as Mr. Wilberforce and Mr. Brougham would that others should do unto them. The Assemblies, in fact, have never so much betrayed their trust as in the attention which they have from time to time unfortunately paid to the urgent and insidious suggestions of that treacherous party, who now unblushingly avow that every measure into which they have cajoled either Parliament or the colonies, for the last thirty years, with respect to the West Indies, under various false pretexts, as they are now admitted to have been, have only been so many occult, but direct steps towards the eventual annihilation of all West India property. In 1806, Parliament, at the instance of the abolitionists, prohibited the exportation of slaves from our islands, or Africa, to foreign colonies. This, as then pretended, was merely to prevent British ships from being employed in a foreign slave trade. The trick succeeded. And the planter, when he afterwards began to suspect that he was shortly to be plundered of his negroes, if he remained in a British colony, found, to his dismay, that he had no longer the power of removing them elsewhere. Our new philosophers, the very next year, accordingly commenced their course of experiments upon the birds which they had thus ingeniously caged for the purpose. The total abolition of the British slave trade took place; every friend of the measure, of every party, however, giving at the same time, *a solemn pledge*, that no intention whatsoever existed,

of interfering with the hitherto acknowledged rights of the proprietors of slaves already in the West Indies. We forbear all details of the further acts that were, from time to time, passed with the same professed view, and with the same assurances; but, as it now appears, with the same falsehood and the same duplicity. At length came forth the memorable Registry Bill of Mr. James Stephen, of 1815, but still, as usual, with a treacherous disclaimer of all intention to disturb the rights of property in the West Indies. But notwithstanding the hypocritical pretences under which the system thus still continued to be pursued, this Bill first roused the colonies to a sense of their danger, and in some degree, opened the eyes of Parliament, to the real objects of the saints. And the matter ended in a sort of compromise, that each of the colonies should pass some such law for itself; thus actually lending themselves, as it now appears, to the predatory views upon their own property, of their most inveterate enemies. The complaisance of the colonies in this respect, was certainly on the extreme. In order to provide against *a supposed evil*, which to their certain knowledge did *not exist*, and of which none of them entertained *the slightest apprehension*, they submitted, each of them, to the self imposition of a useless and intricate system of vexation, personal trouble, risk of property, and enormous expence, both to the country and individuals. And after all, we are now coolly informed, by the very persons whom we allowed to worry us, as it were, into the measure, that they all along had for their main object, in that, of course, as well as every other instance, the total extinction of the system on which the existence of the colonies entirely depends; at the imminent risk, not only of the fortunes, but of the lives also of those who, unhappily for themselves, have trusted too long to the good faith of that hypocritical faction.

In good time, indeed, Mr. Wilberforce declares that he has no confidence in the colonial Assemblies; when they can possibly have no longer any reliance on the truth, justice, or humanity, either of himself individually, or of those who are avowedly associated with him, in the present contemplated work of death and destruction throughout the colonies.

The Assemblies, of course, are now no longer to be imposed upon as they have been. And such of them as have happily reserved to themselves, in any degree, the power of retracing their steps, will, we trust, be well disposed to avail themselves of that advantage. How our Assembly may think proper to act, when the present registration law of these islands expires, we do not pretend at present to decide. But it has been, and ever will continue to be regarded as one of the most odious and exceptionable of all our laws: and after Mr. Wilberforce's undisguised avowal of the uses to be made of all colonial concessions of that nature, we should certainly hold our legislature fairly absolved from all obligation of submitting longer than may be absolutely necessary, to any imposition whatsoever from that quarter.

Although this letter will be printed here, for the use of the members of this Board, there can be no objection, on our part, to its being reprinted with you; should such a measure appear to you advisable. On this point, we leave much to your discretion; with our authority, which we now confer on you, to give it that extent and manner of publication, which under the circumstances of the case, as they may stand at home, you may conceive most conducive to the general interest of the colonies, as well as to the defence of the character of the Bahamas particularly, against the unfounded

slanders that appear to be promulgated with so much industry and so little mercy, against us all. We have only to add one request, that if published at all, this Letter may be given entire, and as it now stands in every respect.

We remain,

Sir,

Your most obedient servants,

LEWIS KERR,
 JAMES DUNSHEE,
 JOHN HEPBURN,
 HENRY M. WILLIAMS,
 THOMAS R. RIGBY,
 ROBERT BUTLER,
 GEORGE K. STORR,
 ROBERT TAYLOR,
 JAMES MEADOWS,
 BENJAMIN TYNES.

George Chalmers, Esq.

&c. &c. &c.

FINIS.



